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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1475

INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHKU/AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY 0003

RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RHMFUU/CJTF HOA PRIORITY

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS ANTANANARIVO 000523

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

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SUBJECT: COMOROS REJECTS CITIZENSHIP BILL FOR STATELESS ARABS

11. (U) The Union of the Comoros' Parliament recently rejected a bill that would confer Comoran citizenship on people in exchange for financial investment in the real estate market. According to Comoran Vice President Idi Nadhoim, in 1997 the Kuwaiti Government approached the Comoros with a proposal to grant approximately 4,000 families of stateless Arabs from certain tribes residing in Kuwait, who are known as "bedoon," Comoran citizenship under a plan that could have brought the state as much USD 100 million. Idi claims the Kuwaiti government also approached Bangladesh, Djibouti and Senegal with a similar proposition. The Comoran Government had promoted the draft law as a means to attract and naturalize foreign investors "without obligation of habitual residence in the Comoros."

Applicants would first apply through the Federal Bank of Commerce or Kuwaiti company Comoro Gulf Holdings, who would vet their proposals to invest in the real estate market.

12. (U) Several lawmakers had supported the proposals, arguing that most bedoon families find themselves in an extremely irregular situation. Depending on the country, the bedoon -- whose population estimates ranges from 70,000 to 120,000 in Kuwait; 10,000 to 100,000 in the United Arab Emirates; and an unknown number in Saudi Arabia -- may not be entitled to hold passports, work, obtain birth certificates, or even have marriage certificates attested. But the Comoran opposition in parliament attacked the project, saying it amounted to "auctioning off our nationality." The former President of the Constitutional Court privately expressed the concern to Ambassador Marquardt that this program would be "demographic suicide" for the isolated Comoros. The "economic citizenship" bill was outright rejected in a stormy extraordinary session of parliament.

13. (SBU) COMMENT: In a private meeting with Ambassador Marquardt, Vice President Idi called the bill the latest example of poor communication within Sambi's administration. The project was reportedly initiated following meetings between the Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah and President Sambi, who reportedly presented the bill without fully consulting his advisors to assess the potential pitfalls. Idi complained, "The President won't consult anyone. People don't give him good advice. They stay quiet. We have communication problems amongst ourselves. The President is isolated." But Post notes that Sambi's presidency has been marked by aggressive and reasonably successful attempts to strengthen relationships and secure pledges of assistance from friendly countries. Oil-rich Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have been among the main economic partners and political allies of the Comoros since President Sambi came to power in 2006. END COMMENT.

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